



IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE

DIRK KEMPTHORNE – Governor
KARL B. KURTZ – Director

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
450 West State Street, 10th Floor
P.O. Box 83720
Boise, ID 83720-0036
PHONE 208-334-5625
FAX 208-334-5926

NEWS RELEASE

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Ross Mason
(208) 334-0693

TWIN FALLS COUNTY BENEFITS FROM \$65.8 MILLION DOLLAR INVESTMENT FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE

Last year, Twin Falls County residents and businesses received \$65.8 million from Department of Health & Welfare programs that help people in need. The investment benefits every one of the county's 67,000 residents. Of Idaho's 44 counties, Twin Falls County ranks number 14 in per capita investment of Health & Welfare dollars.

The disbursement of state and federal tax dollars amounts to \$981 for every man, woman and child residing in Twin Falls County. This includes citizens who may not receive a single direct service from the Department. The statewide average is \$839 per capita.

The Department invested \$1.15 billion in Idaho communities in 2004. These funds came from Medicaid, additional payments to hospitals, Food Stamps, the Idaho Child Care Program, the Women, Infants and Children nutritional program, foster care and a variety of other assistance programs.

"This is an investment for all Twin Falls County residents," says Health & Welfare Director Karl Kurtz. "These are tax dollars put to good use because they are used to help people become healthy and productive. This money goes go to foster care for children in crisis, substance abuse treatment for adults and adolescents, improvements and operations at the local hospital, and dozens of other badly needed services."

“This is as much about sustaining communities as it is investing,” adds Kurtz. “By providing programs that support people, we are helping communities and their residents build the endurance and strength they need to remain vital. Everyone profits from this investment, not just those who use Department programs. This isn’t just me pounding my chest. That’s what community leaders tell us.”

Twin Falls County Commission Chairman Gary Grindstaff says, “These programs help with the medical care for older age people. Department programs help increase our economy. People spend (program) money in local stores and it helps turn the economy. It’s definitely an investment in our county. Medicaid helps offset the cost of the indigent care fund. (Medicaid) is important to keep our hospital solvent.”

In 2004, the Department’s Medicaid Division spent \$55.7 million on health care for residents of the county. Total Medicaid spending in the county was \$58.3 million because many people from other counties travel to Twin Falls for medical care. A large share of the dollars go to drug stores like Sav Mor Drug in Buhl. “The impact of these dollars is significant,” says pharmacy owner Cathi Ketterling. “We have six people in my pharmacy; two pharmacists and three techs. It helps pay for them. The (Medicaid) money just rolls into operations. We’ve expanded our diabetic and DME (durable medical equipment) areas recently.”

The story is much the same at Magic Valley Regional Medical Center. In addition to fees paid for inpatient and outpatient care of Medicaid clients, the hospital also received more than \$1.5 million in extra payments called Federal Upper Payment Limits and Disproportionate Share. These programs compensate hospitals for low Medicaid reimbursement. The extra money can be used for any purpose so anyone using the hospital can potentially benefit from those dollars.

“It’s incredibly important money to us,” says Chief Executive Officer John Kee. “The Department has done a real good job with the program. The bulk of what we use the (extra) payments for is back into capital and plant reinvestment. We’re looking at some major building upgrades and replacement. Our last major update was in 1981. This is a huge focal point for us.” All Medicaid payments to the hospital totaled \$10.4 million.

Twin Falls County residents received \$4 million in Food Stamps to help feed their families and another \$1 million from the Women, Infants and Children nutrition program. Food Stamp spending in the county increased by \$500,000 in 2004. The program served 4,400 people — an increase of 500 over 2003.

Department spending helps people, and it has an upside for business, according to Idaho economist John Church. “This is not lost money. The spending is an investment. It goes back into the economy. If an employer came to town and spent this much money we would be elated. People need to remember that a big chunk of this is federal money which is a huge return on our taxes. This comes back and helps stimulate the economy and it helps people.”

Kurtz adds, “Not only is the Department money a human investment, but it creates jobs and maintains healthy businesses. These dollars recycle numerous times in each community and help us keep the high quality of life we enjoy in Idaho. This is a wise use of taxpayer dollars because the money spent in the community often stays in the community. Those dollars are spent again and again to help create jobs and an infrastructure that provides healthy and safe neighborhoods.”

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(Editors: Interviews are available on request. Contact Ross Mason at 334-0693 or Regional Director John Hathaway at 316-0620 for more information.)

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investment in every Idaho County
can be found online at
<http://www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov>**